

Aftermath

A One-Act Play

By Jonathan Turner Smith

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DEDICATION

To my mom and dad, Mr. & Mrs. J.E. and Juanda Ruth Smith, who loved me unconditionally and never wavered in their support of my artistic endeavors.

And to a loving God who promises a “peace that passes all understanding,” to those experiencing deep grief and loss.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Time and time again, we hear about ordinary people who become extraordinary human beings in the face of traumatic experiences, placing others before themselves in selfless and fearless acts of courage. During two simultaneous therapy sessions, one for students and one for staff, and guided by two grief counselors, we experience the events of a school shooting through those who experienced it firsthand. Blue stage lights mark flashbacks, and ensemble casting allows each character to tell their story. This one-act play allows directors to address the importance of inclusion and recognizing the signs of abuse and mental illness through rap and dialogue that is taken directly from actual transcripts and 911 calls. It is not a political play, but rather celebrates the humanity and heroism that people often demonstrate in times of unbelievable trauma. Ultimately, we see how a community overcomes the loss of classmates and friends and how they can begin to move on and cope in the aftermath of such a tragedy.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 m, 5 w, 2 flexible)

COUNSELOR MENDELSON: *(flexible)* Grief counselor.

COACH POPE: *(m)* Head football coach.

MRS. ANNE COLLIER: *(w)* English teacher. Also plays
Cindy's mother.

MR. STEDLER: *(m)* Math teacher. Also plays Amber's
father.

DR. RUTH MILLER: *(w)* Principal of Rincon High.

MR. CONGER: *(m)* Theatre teacher. Also plays Emergency
Operator.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: *(flexible)* Grief counselor.

LANCE CRAWFORD: *(m)* Senior football player. Also plays
Emergency Operator.

TESSA LEFTWICH: *(w)* Popular junior. Also plays
Emergency Operator and Amber.

CHARLOTTE MENDOZA: *(w)* Quiet, shy senior and best
friends with William.

GRAHAM BISHOP: *(m)* Sophomore, withdrawn. Also plays
Carl.

CINDY WASHINGTON: *(w)* Bright junior.

WILLIAM MCPHERSON: *(m)* Senior and best friends with
Charlotte.

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SETTING

Present day. The play takes place in two classrooms.

SET AND PROPS

There are two semicircles of chairs downstage center. One semicircle has 6 chairs, and the other semicircle has 7 chairs. Each semicircle represents a classroom. The two chairs closest to center stage should be very close.

All actors should have cell phones.

Counselor Mendelson: Notebook or notepad

Mrs. Collier/Cindy's Mom: Large shoulder bag, purse

Mr. Stedler/Amber's Father: Lunch bag, hat, glasses

Cindy/Amber: Backpack, glasses

Dr. Miller: Briefcase

Mr. Conger/Emergency Operator: Backpack

Counselor Hayworth: Notebook or note pad

Lance/Emergency Operator: Backpack

Tessa/Emergency Operator: Backpack, wireless headset
w/microphone

Charlotte: Backpack

Graham/Carl: Backpack, cap, glasses

Cindy/Amber: Backpack, glasses

SUGGESTED WARDROBE

Counselor Mendelson: Business suit

Counselor Hayworth: Business suit

Dr. Miller: Business suit

Lance: Letterman jacket

Graham: Black hoodie

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(AT RISE: As BLUE LIGHTS come up, WILLIAM, CHARLOTTE, and TESSA enter SL and CINDY, GRAHAM, and LANCE enter SR. They all carry backpacks and set them behind, beside, or on the back of their chair. Graham wears a black hoodie with the hood pulled over his head. The following should be delivered with rhythm as a rap or as a poetry performance as the actors interact with one another.)

TESSA: Getting up...
CINDY: Getting ready...
LANCE: Getting steady...
GRAHAM: Getting gone...
WILLIAM: To school...
CINDY: Look cool...
LANCE: Nice kicks...
GRAHAM: Cool T...
LANCE: Looking good.
TESSA: He's hot.
LANCE: They're not.
CHARLOTTE: Classes the same...
WILLIAM: Boring...
LANCE: Snoring...
CHARLOTTE: Exploring...
GRAHAM: New friends...
CINDY: Defend...
TESSA: Comprehend ...
CINDY: The trends...
TESSA: I wear...
LANCE: And share...
GRAHAM: The teacher's glare...
WILLIAM: The stare...
GRAHAM: That stops me cold...
WILLIAM: I fold ...
LANCE: Will the class ever end...
CINDY: Suspend

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WILLIAM: Having to contend...

TESSA: With rules...

ALL: The bell rings...

(GRAHAM sits down.)

CHARLOTTE: It sings...

WILLIAM: As I spring...

LANCE: Up and out...

CINDY: And about I shout...

CHARLOTTE: With glee...

LANCE: To be free...

TESSA: To see...

WILLIAM: The gang hang...

LANCE: It ain't no thang...

WILLIAM: I'll get you through...

CHARLOTTE: Do my best...

TESSA: Stressed...

CINDY: Blessed...

(TESSA, WILLIAM, CHARLOTTE, CINDY, and LANCE sit down.)

ALL: I need rest.

(EVERYONE on stage freezes. DR. MILLER with a briefcase, MR. STEDLER with a lunch bag, and MRS. COLLIER with a large shoulder bag enter SR as MR. CONGER with a backpack and COACH POPE enter SL. The following should be delivered with rhythm as a rap or as a poetry performance as the actors interact with one another.)

DR. MILLER: Another day...

COACH POPE: Another dollar.

MR. STEDLER: Have to holler...

COACH POPE: To be heard.

MR. STEDLER: Absurd the number...

MR. CONGER: Of students

MR. STEDLER: I have...

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MRS. COLLIER: Half that number...

MR. STEDLER: Slumber...

COACH POPE: Sounds good.

MR. CONGER: I would...

MRS. COLLIER: If I could.

MR. CONGER: Should grade...

DR. MILLER: Made...

MRS. COLLIER: Saved...

MR. CONGER: cookies...

COACH POPE: For the team.

MR. CONGER: They beam

MR. STEDLER: As I steam

MRS. COLLIER: I want to...

MR. STEDLER: Yell...

COACH POPE: When is the bell?

(MR. STEDLER places his lunch bag underneath his chair and sits down.)

MRS. COLLIER: Then magic...

DR. MILLER: *(Places her briefcase beside her chair.*

Sitting.) They finally

MR. CONGER: Understand...

MRS. COLLIER: *(Places her bag beside her chair. Sitting.)*

When I give them...

MR. CONGER: A hand...

DR. MILLER: They apply...

MRS. COLLIER: What they learn...

COACH POPE: *(Sitting.)* To discern...

MR. CONGER: *(Hangs his backpack on the back of his chair. Sitting.)* Wrong from right...

DR. MILLER: A constant fight...

MRS. COLLIER: But I'll never take flight...

MR. CONGER: *(Sitting.)* Because in the end...

ALL FOUR: Teaching is a godsend.

(EVERYONE freezes with their heads down. There is a brief moment of silence. As each actor delivers their first line, their head slowly comes up and they deliver their lines to the

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audience. On the first line, the BLUE LIGHTS start to fade, and the STAGE LIGHTS gradually come up. On the last line, the stage lights are fully up.)

ALL: The day it happened...
MRS. COLLIER: I remember it well.
TESSA: The 4th period bell...
WILLIAM: As it rang...
GRAHAM: I ran...
CINDY: To class.
COACH POPE: A mass...
CHARLOTTE: of students...
DR. MILLER: In the hall...
WILLIAM: Some jock...
MR. STEDLER: Throwing a ball...
TESSA: All the teachers...
MR. CONGER: Standing...
GRAHAM: Handing...
COACH POPE: Landing high fives...
CHARLOTTE: Calling our names.
LANCE: The same lame lines...
WILLIAM: Here
TESSA: Here
LANCE: Here
CHARLOTTE: Here
GRAHAM: Here
CINDY: Here
DR. MILLER: The day begins
MR. STEDLER: Scott absent, again?
MR. COLLIER: Books...
MRS. COLLIER: Tests...
CINDY: Pressed...
CHARLOTTE: To be the best.
LANCE: Day after day...
DR. MILLER: The days go by...
MR. CONGER: Until that day...
ALL: *(After a beat.)* We died.

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(COUNSELOR HAYWORTH enters SL and sits in the empty chair in the semicircle with the students, and COUNSELOR MENDELSON enters SR and sits in the empty chair in the semicircle with the adults.)

COUNSELOR MENDELSON: Okay. Welcome, everyone.
I'm Carolyn Mendelson, a grief and trauma counselor.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: Hi everyone. Welcome. My name is Thomas Hayworth. I am a grief and trauma counselor.

COACH POPE: Listen, I need to be on the football field pretty quick here. It's our first game since... uh...several weeks... and we really need to make up for lost time.

COUNSELOR MENDELSON: No problem. Our first session won't take long. I was just going to suggest we go around the room and introduce ourselves. Perhaps include what your position is at the high school.

LANCE: How long will this take? Coach wants me at practice like now.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: Our initial meeting usually only takes about 30 minutes, so you should be back in no time. Why don't we go around the room and introduce ourselves and what grade you're in.

MR. STEDLER: Why do we need to introduce ourselves? We already know each other.

COUNSELOR MENDELSON: Please. It's part of the protocol for these meetings as well as the official record of those in attendance.

(There is a brief pause as everyone assumes MR. STEDLER will begin, which he doesn't.)

DR. MILLER: I'll begin. I'm Ruth Miller. I'm the principal.

GRAHAM: I'm Graham Bishop and I'm a sophomore.

WILLIAM: I'm William McPherson and a senior this year.

MR. CONGER: My name is Sam Conger and I teach Theatre and Speech.

TESSA: I'm Tessa Leftwich and I'm a junior.

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MRS. COLLIER: I'm Anne Collier and I teach senior and AP English.

CINDY: My name is Cindy Washington and I'm a junior.

COACH POPE: Sam Pope, head football coach.

CHARLOTTE MENDOZA: My name is Charlotte Mendoza and I'm a senior.

LANCE: Lance Crawford. I'm a senior, thank God.

MR. STEDLER: (*Obviously annoyed.*) Mr. Stedler. Algebra and Geometry 1 and 2.

COUNSELOR MENDELSON / HAYWORTH: Great. Thank you, everyone.

COACH POPE: Not sure what the purpose is here. I mean shouldn't we be keeping our regular routines... getting back to normal?

MRS. COLLIER: Not sure there is a "normal" anymore.

COUNSELOR MENDELSON: You're right, coach. Sticking to a daily routine is important, but I think you'll find these meetings invaluable in not just coping with what happened but, like you said, helping people start to get back to the "normality" of daily school life.

LANCE: Why do we have to be here, anyway?

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: We're just trying to make sure everyone's alright. These sessions won't take long.

LANCE: Why just us? What about everybody else? I mean there's like 800 kids in this school.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: We felt that small groups would be more advantageous as most people find it easier to share in a small group setting.

MR. STEDLER: Let's get this over with then.

COUNSELOR MENDELSON: (*Ignoring Stedler's comment.*) I need to lay down a couple of ground rules.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: There are a few ground rules. First, I hope everyone will participate. And when someone is sharing, everyone else needs to listen without interrupting.

COUNSELOR MENDELSON: It's important that everyone participate. And everyone needs to listen and not interrupt when someone else is speaking.

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COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: This is a safe place for you to share how you are feeling, without any judgment.

COUNSELOR MENDELSON: You are free to share whatever you would like, especially how you are feeling without any judgement.

MR. STEDLER: Are you going to record what we say? 'Cause if you are, I'm not saying anything.

COUNSELOR MENDELSON: Absolutely not, Mr. Stedler. Everything said in this room stays in this room. Any more questions?

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: Okay. Let's begin.

COACH POPE: I don't know what you want us to share. I mean, what happened is terrible. We all know that. I'm sure all of us relive that day over and over. I just don't know what good it will do by talking about our feelings.

LANCE: What are we supposed to say? I mean yeah, it's terrible that it happened, but what good is sharing our feelings going to do. What happened, happened. End of story.

MRS. COLLIER: I for one do think it's important that we talk about what happened.

DR. MILLER: We all know it's district-mandated to participate in these counseling sessions.

MR. STEDLER: Waste of time if you ask me.

WILLIAM: Still seems like a really bad dream.

TESSA: I just can't seem to understand why it happened.

LANCE: I can tell you why it happened. That kid was psycho.

MR. STEDLER: I've said it over and over that if we had a strong discipline policy something like this would never have happened.

DR. MILLER: We have a strong discipline policy, Mr. Stedler.

MR. STEDLER: Apparently not strong enough. Not to mention we should have metal detectors at the front gate.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH / MENDELSON: Why don't we start by sharing where you were and what you were doing when everything began.

MR. STEDLER: That was my Algebra 2 class. I have 38 students in one class. How does anyone expect any teaching to go on with a class that size?

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LANCE: I was in Mr. Stedler's class. Trying to stay awake.

COACH POPE: It was my conference. That's 4th period. I was in the field house.

MRS. COLLIER: I was teaching my AP English class.

CHARLOTTE: I was in Mrs. Collier's class, but I had gone to the restroom before it all started.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: So, you were in the restroom at the time?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

MR. CONGER: I was in the theatre. We were rehearsing our fall production.

TESSA: I was in theatre.

GRAHAM: I was in the nurse's office.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: Why were you in the nurse's office, Graham?

GRAHAM: Uh... I didn't feel good - like I was coming down with something.

CINDY: I was in Ms. Torres' Spanish class, but we had a sub.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: Your class was the one outside in the hall, correct?

CINDY: Yes. Most of us were.

DR. MILLER: I was in my office. I had just sent William McPherson to your class, Mr. Stedler, with a note for one of your students to come see me.

WILLIAM: I was in the office. I'm an office aide 4th period.

COUNSELOR MENDELSON / HAYWORTH: Good.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: Let's talk about what occurred after the first shots. What did you do or feel? ... Feel free to share whatever you like.

COUNSELOR MENDELSON: Please feel free to share what you did or felt after you heard the first shots.

COUNSELOR HAYWORTH: *(After a beat.)* I know this is difficult. I don't think anyone can really understand what each of you went through. I know it was horrifying and not wanting to talk about it is very normal. Giving a voice to what happens means that it really happened. But talking about it also takes away some of its power.

(Pause.)

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TESSA: I thought it was firecrackers - I mean I'd never heard a real gun shot before - just on TV and movies.

MR. CONGER: At first, I thought it was firecrackers. Last year a student set off a bunch outside.

MRS. COLLIER: I did too. But then I heard the screams. And I knew it wasn't firecrackers.

CINDY: Sounded like heavy books being dropped on the floor.

LANCE: I knew it was a gun. I tried to leave class to see what I could do, but Stedler wouldn't let me.

TESSA: Never stopped you before.

LANCE: What's that supposed to mean?

TESSA: Nothing. Just that you've been able to leave class before whether Mr. Stedler let you go or not. Just saying.

MR. STEDLER: Firecrackers or gunshots – I wasn't taking any chances. I locked the door and turned out the lights. Just like we practiced.

DR. MILLER: I immediately got on the intercom and announced we were on lockdown.

MRS. COLLIER: When I heard the screaming, I immediately called nine-one-one.

MR. CONGER: Same here.

DR. MILLER: I'm pretty sure every teacher in the school did.

MRS. COLLIER: Students and teachers were calling parents and family members.

CINDY: Everyone was texting and calling their friends.

TESSA: And posting on social media.

(The following are reenactments. As the STAGE LIGHTS dim, EVERYONE freezes. The lights FADE to BLACK. MR. CONGER gets up and stands behind his chair with a cell phone. TESSA removes a wireless headset from her backpack and puts it on. She then silently picks up her chair and moves it to DSC of her semi-circle. She sits down in the chair. TESSA is now the EMERGENCY OPERATOR. BLUE LIGHTS come up.)

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EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Nine-one-one. What's the emergency?

MR. CONGER: *(Speaks softly, but urgently.)* I'm a teacher at Rincon High School and I think there's someone shooting in our school.

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Did you say there's an active shooter in the high school?

MR. CONGER: Yes, yes.

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: What is your name, sir?

MR. CONGER: Sam Conger... They're in the hallway. People are screaming and I can see...`

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: How many are there?

MR. CONGER: I don't know. I think one... I'm not sure.

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: We have dispatched the police and emergency services. Where are you, Mr. Conger?

MR. CONGER: I'm standing at my classroom door. I can see students running... Wait... I have to get these students in the classroom— *(MR. CONGER freezes.)*

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Mr. Conger, don't open... Mr. Conger... are you still there. Hello?

(The BLUE LIGHTS fade to BLACK as MR. CONGER returns to his spot. LANCE trades places with TESSA and she hands him the headset. He is now the EMERGENCY OPERATOR. DR. MILLER goes to the right side of COACH POPE'S chair DSR and crouches down as if she is hiding. She takes a cell phone from her jacket pocket. The BLUE LIGHTS come up.)

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Nine-one-one. What's your emergency?

DR. MILLER: My name is Dr. Ruth Miller. I'm the principal at Rincon High School. There is an active shooter on campus.

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: I am dispatching the police and emergency services, Dr. Miller. Do you know if anyone has been injured?

DR. MILLER: I don't know.

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Where is the shooter?

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DR. MILLER: I'm not sure. Maybe in the north hall by the theatre.

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Where are you, Dr. Miller?

DR. MILLER: In the main office. There are students and the rest of the office staff in my office. They're barricaded...
(*Speaking to an unseen Mr. Bartlett.*) Mr. Bartlett, be careful...

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Dr. Miller, police should be there any minute...

DR. MILLER: (*Panicking.*) Oh my God... Oh my God. Mr. Bartlett! Mr. Bartlett's been shot!

(The BLUE LIGHTS fade to BLACK. DR. MILLER returns to her seat and puts away her cell phone. MR. CONGER, now an EMERGENCY OPERATOR, goes to LANCE and takes the headset. He returns to his seat and puts on the headset as LANCE silently takes his chair back to the semi-circle. Tessa sits in her original chair as does Lance. They both freeze. GRAHAM removes his hoodie and places it on his chair. He takes a cap and glasses from his backpack and puts them on and grabs a cell phone. He is now another student, CARL. He then crouches behind his chair. The BLUE LIGHTS come up.)

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Nine-one-one. What's—

CARL: (*Frantically pleading.*) Please, you gotta help us. Someone is shooting in our school. Please help us.

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Okay. Calm down, son. I can barely understand you.

CARL: Oh god. I think he just shot someone.

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Who. Who is shooting?

CARL: Help us. Please, please, please, please. Help us.

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Emergency services are on their way. Stay with me. What's your name? (*No answer.*)
Tell me your name, son. I'm right here with you.

CARL: Carl.

EMERGENCY OPERATOR: Okay, Carl. where are you? Are you hiding somewhere?

CARL: I'm in a janitor's closet.

End of Freeview

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